

ROLE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN FOSTERING INNOVATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

CHINWE SUSSAN OGUEJIOFOR

&

IRENE CHINWE EMELIFE

Department of Vocational Education
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University
Igbariam, Anambra State, Nigeria

Abstract

This study examined the role of entrepreneurship education in fostering innovation in Nigeria. Entrepreneurship education is recognized as a vital tool for promoting innovation, entrepreneurship, economic growth and development. However, the Nigerian economy faces significant challenges which include lack of innovation and entrepreneurship. The study explores the roles of entrepreneurship education in the development of skills and competencies among Nigerian youths. It also investigates the challenges and strategies for promoting entrepreneurship education in Nigerian universities. The study recommends the development of policies and programmes to support entrepreneurship education and innovation.

Keywords: Role, Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship Education, Innovation, Sustainable development.

Introduction

Nigeria, with a population of over 180 million people, is African's most populous country and has the continent's largest economy (World Bank, 2016). Despite its vast human and natural resources, Nigeria has struggled to achieve sustainable economic growth and development, with poverty and unemployment remaining significant challenges (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). The Nigerian government has recognized the importance of entrepreneurship and innovation in driving economic growth and development, and has implemented various initiatives aimed at promoting entrepreneurship and innovation (National Policy on Education, 2016). Entrepreneurship education has been identified as a critical component in fostering a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation (Lackeus, 2016). Entrepreneurship education in Nigeria amongst other things seeks to provide students in tertiary institutions with the knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage entrepreneurial success in a variety of ventures. Variations of entrepreneurship education are offered at all levels of schooling in Nigeria, from primary to secondary schools through the graduate university programmes. It is a lifelong learning process.

In Nigeria, entrepreneurship education has gained significant attention in recent years, with various institutions offering entrepreneurship programmes (Adebayo, 2016). However, despite these efforts, entrepreneurship education in Nigeria still faces significant challenges, including inadequate funding, lack of infrastructure, and limited access to resources (Olokundun et al., 2016). Further more research has shown that entrepreneurship education can have a positive impact on innovation, as it provides individuals with the necessary skills, knowledge, and mindset to create innovative solutions to real world problems (QAA 2016).

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the role of entrepreneurship education in fostering innovation in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is the ability to create and build something from practically nothing. It is initiating, doing, achieving, and building an enterprise or organization. Entrepreneurship necessitates the dissemination of additional knowledge regarding the opportunities and impacts on the environment, society, and economy that are relevant to young and aspiring entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship is the process of designing, launching, and running a business venture, which involves taking calculated risks, innovating, and persevering to create something of value. Shane and Venkataraman (2021) defined entrepreneurship as the process of discovery, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities. Hisrich et al., (2019) opined that entrepreneurship is the process of creating something new with value by devoting the necessary time and effort, assuming the accompanying financial, psychic, and social risks, and receiving the resulting rewards. Alaka and Okogua in Oguejiofor & Ezenwaji (2023) perceived entrepreneurship as the willingness and the ability of an individual to seek for investment opportunities, to establish and run an enterprise successfully towards a vibrant and successful national economy. It can also be conceptualized to mean the process and activities undertaken by entrepreneurs directed at capturing value associated with business opportunities.

Entrepreneurship is the practice of launching, running, and growing a business venture, requiring a combination of innovation, skills, and clear vision to create products, services, or ideas that meet market demands and offer value to a target audience. At its core, entrepreneurship involves transforming ideas into reality, and those who choose this path are ready to face the risks that come with starting a new business. Successful entrepreneurs embody passion, grit, and a desire to bring ideas to life, solving real world problems and improving lives through their endeavours.

Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurial education refers to the process of equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, and mindset needed to develop an entrepreneurial mindset and succeed in entrepreneurial endeavors. Entrepreneurship Education, within the realm of Economics Education, acts as a catalyst for transforming theoretical knowledge into actionable initiatives. It transcends the conventional classroom approach by integrating real-world experiences, case studies, and practical exercises. By exposing students to entrepreneurial concept such as ideation, business planning, financial management, and risk assessment, entrepreneurship education nurtures an entrepreneurial mindset (Mohammed and Pitan, 2022). This mindset not only instills a sense of initiative but also foster adaptability, resilience, and creativity-essential qualities for budding entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship education has been shown to have a positive impact on innovation in Nigeria.

[Entrepreneurship education](#) has been reported to support an increase in the value of entrepreneurial outputs. Entrepreneurial skills are also promoted to ensure that university students develop an opportunity-oriented perspective. In recent times, several national governments have increased collaboration with universities in a bid to drive initiatives for entrepreneurship and innovation. Entrepreneurial education is focused on developing youths

as well as individuals with passion and multiple skills. Entrepreneurship education has to do with encouraging and inspiring children, youths, and elders on how to be independent both in thinking and creativity in business. Entrepreneurial education refers to the process of equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, and mindset needed to develop an entrepreneurial mindset and succeed in entrepreneurial endeavors (Yinka and Chidinma 2025). Opportunities for fostering entrepreneurship in secondary schools are manifold. Programmes like business simulations, innovation hubs, and school-led enterprises allow students to experiment with their ideas in low-risk environments. Partnerships with local businesses, tech startups, and educational NGOs also provide experiential learning opportunities, connecting students to mentors who can guide them in areas like project management, customer relations, and financial literacy. Through project-based learning, students can explore real world challenges, developing solutions and testing them with potential users. Furthermore, extracurricular activities such as student-led clubs, and business competitions, encourage teamwork, collaboration and competitive spirit, which are essential in any entrepreneurial journey. Okoye in Oguejiofor and Umeh (2017) stated that the introduction of entrepreneurship education in institutions of higher learning is not just a welcome development but also a major step towards solving the economic problems through employment generation. This is largely due to entrepreneurial skills development inculcated in the learners. In today's world, entrepreneurship is seen as a vital source for economic growth and competitiveness, job creation as well as wealth creation and providing societal interests.

Innovation

Innovation is the process of introducing new improved products, services, processes, or business models that create value for individuals, organizations, or society as a whole. As stated by Crossan and Apaydin (2019), innovation is the process of creating and implementing new ideas, products, services, or processes that provide value to customers, improve efficiency, or create new markets. Keeley et al., (2021) defines innovation as the process of transforming ideas into new or improved products, services, or processes that create value for customers and drive business growth.

Innovation is the specific tool of entrepreneurs, the means by which they exploit change as an opportunity for a different business or service. In the modern economy, innovation is crucial for value creation, growth and employment and innovation processes take place at the enterprise, regional and national level. Innovation will lead to new businesses as well as to the increased competitiveness of existing enterprise (Muna, 2015). Innovation is typically understood as the successful introduction of something new, and useful, for example introducing new methods, techniques, practices, products or services. An important distinction is normally made between invention and innovation. Invention is the first occurrence of an idea for new product or process, while innovation is the first attempt to carry it out into practice (Fang and School, 2016). In reality, an idea, a change or an improvement is only an innovation when it is put to use, and such effectively, causes a social reorganization. Innovation occurs when someone uses an invention or an idea to change how things work, how people organize themselves, or how they conduct their lives.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Kate et al., (2016) emphasized that sustainable development requires balancing economic, social, and environmental considerations to ensure a livable future. Sustainable development involves integrating economic, social, and environmental dimensions to achieve a holistic approach to development. Sustainable development aims to ensure human well-being and environmental protection by promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Oguejiofor & Ezeabasili (2016) defined sustainable development as a kind of development that can be initiated and managed properly in such a way as to give attention to continuity and preservation as people explore an explicit available resources for the enlargement of their existence. Sustainable development is a construct, which envision development as meeting the need of the present generation without compromising the needs of the future generation. For development to be sustained there must be human development.

Roles of entrepreneurship education in fostering innovation for sustainable development in Nigeria

Entrepreneurship and innovation are increasingly recognized as important drivers of economic growth, productivity and employment, and as a key aspect of economic dynamism. Entrepreneurship is an innovative behaviour of people. It is a way of doing business through creativity and innovation in identifying business opportunities. To ensure that people possess the requisite skills, knowledge, and abilities for creativity and innovation, entrepreneurship education becomes necessary. It is on this premise that entrepreneurship education was introduced in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Entrepreneurship education therefore, is the act of transmitting and imparting knowledge and skills on the student or learner for innovative and creative behaviour. It entails the acquisition of accounting and finance skills, production skills, marketing skills, human resource skills, information and communication technology skills, communication skills, among others (Oguejiofor & Umeh 2019). According to Manish and Sunil (2015), entrepreneurship education is the curriculum aimed at developing entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviour, venture creation spirit and motivation in a manner that ensure entrepreneurial success through innovation.

As it was opined by Fang and School (2016), stimulating the creative potential of students, promoting the stimulation of students' individuality and enhancing the professionalism, and improving students' strong pioneering spirit in entrepreneurship are the core and connotation of entrepreneurship education. Entrepreneurship education has educational value, which is embodied in the cultivation of students' knowledge, practical innovation ability and professional ability, so that students can start their own businesses and promote the overall development and progress of students. The educational value of innovation and entrepreneurship is also reflected in the important aspect of training students' professional quality development, and the students' entrepreneurial skills are created through specific training forms. Students' views on their entrepreneurship education are related to their perception of innovation; fostering innovation through entrepreneurship education is the primary task of universities. Innovative awareness and innovative ability are also influenced by innovation personality.

In the opinion of Muna (2015), the benefits of entrepreneurial education include: creation of entrepreneurial thinkers who also have the skills and tools to start their own businesses; writing a business plan; applying economic principles; determining individual entrepreneurial interests; applying basic marketing skills; using strategies for idea generation; assessing feasibility of ideas; managing risk; identifying legitimate sources of capital; evaluating ownership structures; translating problems into opportunities; applying principles of human relations management; applying basic accounting and financial management principles; and engaging in ethical business practices; demonstrating. Entrepreneurship education is not just about teaching someone to run a business, it is about encouraging creative thinking and promoting innovation. Wei et al., (2019) emphasized that entrepreneurship education cultivates inventive talents which are vital driving force for future development, since innovation-driven development strategies place new demands on entrepreneurship education at the present time.

Entrepreneurship education is an important way for entrepreneurs to acquire resources, enhance innovative ability and innovative personality, and build multi-level learning channels for entrepreneurs by integrating various knowledge and value systems. From knowledge learning to skills improvement, entrepreneurship education includes general ability development and improvement of professional ability. Entrepreneurship education is critical for successful innovation. When students are provided with entrepreneurship skills, they become innovative, which will lead to self-reliance and wealth creation thereby reducing the level of poverty and unemployment in the economy. Entrepreneurship education cultivates innovative talents, which are an important driving force for future development. At present, innovation driven development strategies place new demands on entrepreneurship education. However, most of the current research and discussion in this field focuses on the construction of teaching staff in the entrepreneurial education ecosystem (Ruskovaara & Pihkala, 2015), curriculum development (Falck et al., 2016), and whether entrepreneurship education can influence the intention of entrepreneurship (Pittaway & Cope, 2016).

Entrepreneurship stands as a pivotal propellant of our economy. The genesis of prosperity and a substantial portion of employment opportunities trace back to small enterprises initiated by individuals with an entrepreneurial mindset, a considerable number of who ascend to establish significant ventures. Those exposed to entrepreneurship frequently attest to a heightened ability to exercise creative liberties, an augmented sense of self-worth, and an overarching sensation of authority over their lives. As a consequence, numerous seasoned business professionals, political leaders, economists, and educators assert that cultivating a resilient entrepreneurial ethos is imperative, as it holds the potential to amplify both individual and collective economic and social accomplishments at local, national, and global levels. In alignment with this vision, the formulation of National Standards for Entrepreneurship Education was undertaken. This framework was devised with the explicit objective of equipping young individuals and adults alike with the tools essential for prospering within an entrepreneurial economy. By offering a structured curriculum rooted in entrepreneurship, this education prepares individuals to seize opportunities, manifest innovative ideas, and contribute dynamically to economic growth and societal progress. It is through the cultivation of this entrepreneurial mindset that communities and nations can realize their fullest potential, fostering a future brimming with possibilities and achievements.

Entrepreneurship education plays a crucial role in fostering innovation for sustainable development in Nigeria. It helps develop a sustainable mindset among students, enabling them to identify opportunities for sustainable innovation (Adejumo, 2017). It encourages innovation and creativity by teaching students how to generate and evaluate sustainable business ideas. Entrepreneurship education equips students with essential skills and competencies, such as problem solving, critical thinking, and teamwork, necessary for sustainable innovation (QAA,2018). Igwe et al., (2016) stated that entrepreneurship education enhances the skills and competences of Nigerian entrepreneurs, enabling them to develop sustainable businesses. Entrepreneurship education contributes to sustainable development by creating new businesses, jobs, and opportunities that address social, economic, and environmental challenges (Acs et al., 2016). Entrepreneurship education has a positive impact on sustainable development in Nigeria, leading to improved economic growth, social justice, and environmental protection.

Importance of entrepreneurship includes:

- a) **Skill Development:** Entrepreneurship encourages essential skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, communication, and leadership. Students learn how to set goals, manage resources, and work within a team skills valuable in any career path.
- b) **Career Preparedness and Employability:** Exposure to entrepreneurial thinking helps students understand diverse career options beyond traditional employment. They become better prepared to navigate future job markets, where adaptability, innovation, and self-reliance are increasingly valued.
- c) **Promoting Innovation and Creativity:** Entrepreneurship education nurtures creativity by encouraging students to think outside the box, identify unmet needs, and develop innovative solutions. This fosters a mindset of continuous improvement and curiosity.
- d) **Economic Awareness and Financial Literacy:** Entrepreneurship introduces students to fundamental concepts of economics, finance, and budgeting. These lessons in financial literacy prepare them for sound decision-making in both business and personal finance.
- e) **Empowerment and Confidence:** By taking ownership of projects and seeing their ideas come to life, students build self-confidence and develop a sense of responsibility. This empowerment helps them face challenges and setbacks more resiliently.

Challenges of entrepreneurship education and their proffered solutions

Entrepreneurship education faces several challenges that hinder its effectiveness. Some of the challenges include the following:

Lack of practical experience

- **Challenge:** Entrepreneurship education often focuses on theoretical knowledge rather than practical application, resulting in a lack of hands-on experience for students.
- **Solution:** Integrate experiential learning methods such as business incubators, accelerators and mentorship programmes, to provide students with practical experience.

Limited resources

- **Challenge:** Entrepreneurship education programmes often face budget constraints, limiting the availability of resources such as mentorship, networking opportunities, and funding.
- **Solution:** Seek partnerships with external organizations, such as businesses, government agencies, and non-profit organizations, to access resources and funding.

Curriculum design

- **Challenge:** Entrepreneurship education curricula often fail to incorporate essential skills such as creativity, innovation, and risk management
- **Solution:** Revise curricula to include experiential learning, design thinking, and lean startup methodologies to foster creativity, innovation, and risk management.

Faculty competence

Faculty competence refers to the combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that a faculty instructor possesses to effectively teach, guide, and assess students in a specific academic discipline or subject area.

- **Challenge:** Entrepreneurship educators often lack the necessary experience and qualifications to teach entrepreneurship effectively.
- **Solution:** Provide faculty training and development programmes to enhance their knowledge and skills in entrepreneurship education.

Cultural and environmental barriers

- **Challenge:** Cultural and environmental factors such as risk aversion fear of failure, and limited access to resources can hinder entrepreneurial endeavours.
- **Solution:** Foster a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem by promoting entrepreneurship culture, providing resources and funding, and encouraging experimentation and risk-taking.

Conclusion

Entrepreneurship education plays a crucial role in fostering innovation in Nigeria. By integrating entrepreneurship education into the curriculum, Nigerian universities can produce graduates with the skills and mindset to create innovative solutions to the country's challenges. As noted by Olumide et al., (2017), entrepreneurship education can enhance the entrepreneurial intentions and competencies of Nigerian youths, thereby promoting innovation and economic growth. Similarly, Akpoyomare et al., (2017) emphasized the importance of entrepreneurship education in developing the skills and knowledge required for innovative entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

In conclusion, entrepreneurship education is essential for fostering innovation in Nigeria. By providing students with the necessary skills, knowledge, and mindset, entrepreneurship education can help promote innovative entrepreneurship and drive economic growth in Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. **Integrate innovation into entrepreneurship training:** Innovation should form an integral component of entrepreneurship training at all levels in Nigeria.

2. **Foster entrepreneurial intentions:** Entrepreneurship education should foster entrepreneurial intentions among Nigerian youths, in order to reduce unemployment and poverty.
3. **Promote sustainable development:** Entrepreneurship education should be able to equip undergraduates with skills to function well and contribute to the society upon graduation.
4. **Address challenges and strategies:** Entrepreneurship education in Nigeria should address challenges such as inadequate funding, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of qualified educators, and develop strategies to promote entrepreneurship exploration in higher education.

References

- Acs, Z.J., Estrin, S., & Mickiewicz, T. (2016). *Innovation, entrepreneurship and the growth of cities*. Edward Elgar publishing.
- Adebayo, A. (2016). Entrepreneurship education in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *Journal of Entrepreneurship Education*, 19(2), 1-12.
- Adejumo, G. O. (2017). Entrepreneurship education and sustainable development in Nigeria. *Journal of entrepreneurship education*, 20(2), 1-9
- Consortium for Entrepreneurship Education (2008). *Entrepreneurship everywhere: The case for entrepreneurship education*. Columby, USA.
- Crossan, M. M., & Apaydin, M. (2019). Innovation: a systematic review and future directions. *Journal of Management*, 45(1), 3-34.
- Fang, Q. & School, B. (2016). Thinking and practice on the curriculum construction of innovation and entrepreneurship in higher vocational education. *Journal of Baotou Vocational & Technical College*.
- Hisrich, R. D., Peters, M. P., & Shepherd, D. A. (2019). *Entrepreneurship*. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Igwe, P. A., Igwe, U. C., & Nwakoby, I. P. (2017). The impact of entrepreneurship education on the skills and competencies of Nigerian entrepreneurs. *Journal of Entrepreneurship Education*, 20(1), 1-12.
- Kate, R. W., Paris, T. M., & Leiserowitz, A. A. (2016). What is sustainable development? Goals, indicator, values, and practice. *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable development*, 58(3), 8-21
- Keeley, L., Piikkel, R., Quinn, J., & Walters, H. (2021). *Ten types of innovation: the Discipline of Building Breakthroughs*. Wiley.
- Lackeus, M. (2016). Entrepreneurship education: A systematic review. *International Review of Entrepreneurship*, 14(2), 149-174.
- Manish, K.G. & Sunil, K.S. (2015). Entrepreneurship education: Concept, characteristics and implications for teacher education. *International Journal of Education*, 5 (1), 21-35.
- Mohammed, A. O. & Pitan, O. S. (2022). Innovation and renewal economics curriculum in Nigerian Secondary Schools: Approaches, problems and Strategies. *Journal of Economics and Environmental Education*, 6(1), 1-14. Retrieved from <http://iafee.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Mohammed-A-O-and-Pitan-OS-JEEE-Vol-6-pp-1-14-1.pdf>.
- Muna, A. (2015). Innovation and entrepreneurship integration in education. Ohaio state model. *International Journal of Teaching and Education*, III (3), 1-20.

- National Bureau of Statistics (2016). Nigerian Gross Domestic Product Report. National Bureau of Statistics.
- National Policy on Education (2016). Federal Republic of Nigeria.
- Olokundun, M. A., Ibidunni, A. S., & Amaihian, A. B. (2016). Entrepreneurship education and economic development in Nigeria. *Journal of Entrepreneurship and innovation*, 5(1), 1-10.
- Oguejiofor, C. S. & Ezeabasili, A. C.C. (2016). Imperatives of Vocational Education and Sustainable Development in Nigerian. *African Research Review. An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia* Vol. 8 (1):42-52
- Oguejiofor, C. S. & Umeh, U. F. (2017). Mentoring In Entrepreneurship: Imperative For Nigeria's Economic Development. *Nigerian Journal of Business Education (NIGJBED)* Volume 4 (.1) 223-231
- Oguejiofor, C. S & Ezenwaji, C. F (2023). Extent Of Entrepreneurial Orientation As A Strategy For Improved Productivity Of Small And Medium Scale Enterprises In Anambra State. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Vocational Education & Research; Vol.5(1)* Pp.163 - 173.
- Oguejiofor, C.S & Umeh, U.F (2019)The Status of Business Education in promoting Reliable and Sound Economic Growth in the oil Sector in Delta State. *Merit Research Journal of Education and Review*.7(3)26-31
- Pittaway, L., & Cope, J. (2016). Entrepreneurship education: a systematic review of the evidence. *Social Science Electron Publish*. 25, 479 510.
- QAA (2016). Enterprise and entrepreneur education: Guidance for UK higher education providers. Quality Assurance Agency.
- QAA (2018). Entrepreneurship and enterprise. Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.
- Ruskovaara, E. & Pihkala, T. (2015). Entrepreneurship education in schools: empirical evidence on the teachers' role. *Journal of Educational Research*. 108, 236 249
- Shane, S., & Venkataraman, S. (2021). The promise of entrepreneurship as a field of research. *Academy of Management Review*, 46(2), 221-234.
- Wei, X., Liu, X., & Sha, J. (2019). How does entrepreneurship education influence the students' innovation? Testing on the multiple mediation model. *Frontiers in Psychology*.
- World Bank (2016). World Development indicators. world bank
- Yinka, K.R, Chidinma, A.E. (2025). Entrepreneurship among secondary school students: opportunities, challenges, and the role in fostering innovation. *Soc Int J*. 2025;9(1):27–33.